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The Relationship between Workplace Conflict and Psychological Strain: The Moderating Role of Social Relational Personality Traits

by

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ABSTRACT

Workplace conflict is a social phenomenon that places increased demands to the psychological well-being of employees, causing experiences of strain. The strength of the relationship between conflict and strain has been shown to be impacted by individuals' personalities. One such personality trait is agreeableness. In the context of South Africa, agreeableness contains additional social relational personality traits that extend the traditional Five Factor Model of personality and consists of six factors including: social relational positive and social relational negative. The current study looks at the causal relationship between workplace conflict (task and relational) and employees' experience of psychological stress/strain, with the moderating effect of the social relational traits. Data on the participants experiences of workplace conflict and strain, along with their personality traits were collected from a sample of South African employees (*N*= 230). The Intragroup Conflict Scale (ICS) -9 items, General Work Stress Scale (GWS) -9 items, and the South African Personality Inventory (SAPI) - 188 items were used to quantify the variables of the study. The study indicated workplace conflict (task and relational conflict) causes the experiences of strain amongst employees. With regards to social relational traits, social relational positive did not significantly moderate the relationship between workplace conflict (task and relational conflict) and psychological strain. On the other side, the social relational negative significantly moderated the relationship between workplace conflict (task and relational conflict) and psychological strain. This study highlights the importance of looking at employees' psychological well-being as a focus area that organisations ought to follow in the future and also providing a platform to be aware of conflict. Theoretically, a new perspective to the study of personality, with the social relational traits offers a broad view in personality studies.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

According to De Frank and Ivancevich (1998), demands at work form a major blue-print of organisations' identities, resulting in experiences of physiological and psychological strain. One of the demands include experiencing conflict at work. When working with other individuals, being exposed to and having to deal with conflict is an activity that cannot be separated from the context of work (Tjosvold, 2008). Therefore, in the world of work, conflict is a common occurrence affecting organisations globally and South Africa is not an exception (Combrink, 2014). This chapter provides the background to the study and the problem statement.

1.2 Background to the study

Generally speaking, conflict at work occurs when there are discrepancies between employees at the different levels of the organisational hierarchy (Shweta & Srirang, 2010; Combrink, 2014). Organisational conflict arises from subtle instances where employees compete over resources such as space for parking, improved remuneration, opportunities to get promoted, and over the distribution of budgets within departments amongst other things (Jex, 2002). This often escalates into intense competition, where employees have disagreements about how task-related problems should be solved due to their conflicting understandings, views and beliefs of how activities should be accomplished, resulting in task level conflict (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). In addition to that, employees often have conflicts at interpersonal level, where they show personally related negative feelings such as hatred,

rudeness and disgust towards each other in what is known as relational/relationship level conflict (Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004).

Studies (see Pearson, Ensley, & Amason, 2002; De Dreu, van Dierendonck, and De Best-Waldhober, 2003) show that conflict at work is a common phenomenon that organisations and employees need to be wary of. The impact of conflict undoubtedly has serious implications for all parties involved. For individuals, workplace conflict has been shown to affect their collective performances in groups (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003) as well as their health and well-being, to the extent that individuals report increased cases of absenteeism (Ortega et al., 2011) and/or being on sick leave (Oxenstierna et al., 2011). From an organisational perspective, conflict poses a threat to the financial productivity and reputation of an organization (Buss, 2011; Combrink, 2014), thereby impeding the organisations' efforts to attain performance objectives (Aminu & Marfo, 2010).

1.3 Problem Statement

Different scholars (Thomas, 1992; De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Dijkstra, Beersma, and Evers, 2011) point out that the effects of how conflict at work impacts on observable aspects such as organisational, team and individual performance is well documented in research. It is suggested that research endeavours should be channelled towards understanding the impact that workplace conflict has on unobservable issues such as the psychological well-being of employees, which finds expression in the form of stress-related consequences such as psychological strain (Dijkstra et al., 2011).

Based on the arguments above, it is clear that conflict at work does not only have financial implications for organisations but also has underlying emotional consequences on the workers themselves (Combrink, 2014). James and Sidin (2017) point out that managers

have channelled much of their attention to growing organisations, while the mental and physical well-being of employees has been left to falter as a result. Mansell, Brough and Cole (2006) argue that utility of the organisations' improved financial performance is void if it is to the detriment of the employees' physical and psychological well-being. As such, it is important to consider conflict and emotional well-being, as it has positive and negative outcomes for the effectiveness of both employees and organisations (Mansell et al., 2006).

According to Dijkstra, van Dierendonck, Evers, and De Dreu (2005), for research and practical purposes, an improved comprehension of the relationship between conflict at work and psychological health is needed. Based on this observation, the importance of this study is underlined by its attempt to improve the understanding of conflict and psychological health. This will be done by investigating the impact of conflict at work on the experiences of psychological strain in a sample of South African employees, taking into account their social relational personalities.

The role of personality on the experience of conflict and psychological strain cannot be understated. In fact, literature highlights the possible moderating role of personality on the relationship between stress and well-being (Bolger & Zuckermann, 1995). However, in the existing literature on conflict and emotional health, the role that personality plays in this relationship has not received much attention (Dijkstra et al., 2005). It is less known how an individual's personality may affect the manner in which they deal with conflict and the subsequent effects that this may have on their experiences of job stress and/or strain. It is thus important to look at the impact of personality, specifically how people socially relate to others, regarding the conflict-psychological stress/strain relationship.

According to Graziano, Jensen-Campbell and Hair (1996), the agreeableness trait is essential in the study of conflict given its focus on the formation of personal relationships.

Agreeableness relates to individuals' natural disposition to want to form connections with other people based on positive feelings such as connection, warmth, closeness and communication with others (Dijkstra et al., 2005). Individuals who are high on agreeableness are reported to be trustful, submissive, selfless and immersed in others (Costa and McCrae, 1992) while they also show a greater will to solve conflicts in a positive manner (Dijkstra et al., 2005). People who are highly agreeable also tend to show sympathy, forgiveness and helpfulness, often to an extent that they can be easily taken advantage of by others (McCrae & Costa, 1987, Törnross, 2015).

Conversely, Ashton and Lee (2012) report that people low on agreeableness are said to show behaviours of antagonism, hostility, irritability, and mistrust towards other people. People low on agreeableness are prone to act in a retaliatory manner towards people they believe have wronged them, suggesting that they may be unforgiving and inclined to get involved in conflict more frequently (Jensen-Campbell, Gleason, Adams, & Malcom, 2003). In essence, these people are labelled unsociable, emotionless and self-centred, and tend to act aggressively towards other individuals at work (Berry, Ones, & Sacket, 2007; Berry, Charlier, Mount, & Oh, 2014), which could be a major cause of conflict.

Apart from the connection agreeableness has with conflict, in research it is important to look at other reasons why we should focus on agreeableness. Possible reasons include that, because we exist in a collective society, where collectivism and relationships with others form a huge part of our identity as humans, agreeableness is related to a sense of community and collectivism (Ashton & Lee, 2001; Digman, 1997; Wiggins & Trapnell, 2001). Additionally, personality researchers such as Jensen-Campbell and Graziano (2001), suggest that within the Five Factor Model (FFM), it is important to study agreeableness as this trait has not been understood in greater detail as the other factors in the model, yet it accounts for a major part of total variance explained in the FFM (Goldberg, 1995; Graziano & Eisenberg,

1997; Kohnstamm et al., 1998). In an extended FFM model, the South African Personality Inventory (SAPI) introduced an extension of agreeableness due to its specific definition in the South African context.

The major reason for this research to focus on the extension of agreeableness is because agreeableness contains social relational (positive and negative) components that are unique to the South African population (Valchev et al., 2014). Hence, the current study focuses on the moderating role of social relational traits (positive and negative) on the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain. Accordingly, the present study adds value to the current body of knowledge by 1) highlighting the importance of social personality traits in dealing with conflict, 2) adding to the scarce amount of research studies focusing on the association that workplace conflict has with psychological strain in South Africa, and 3) showing organisations the potential negative effect that conflict has on psychological strain.

1.4 Objectives of this study

The current study aims to:

- Investigate the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain within a sample of South African employees.
- Investigate the moderating effect of the social relational **positive** trait on the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain within a sample of South African employees.

- Investigate the moderating effect of the social relational **negative** trait on the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain within a sample of South African employees.

The hypothesised research model is presented in figure 1 below.

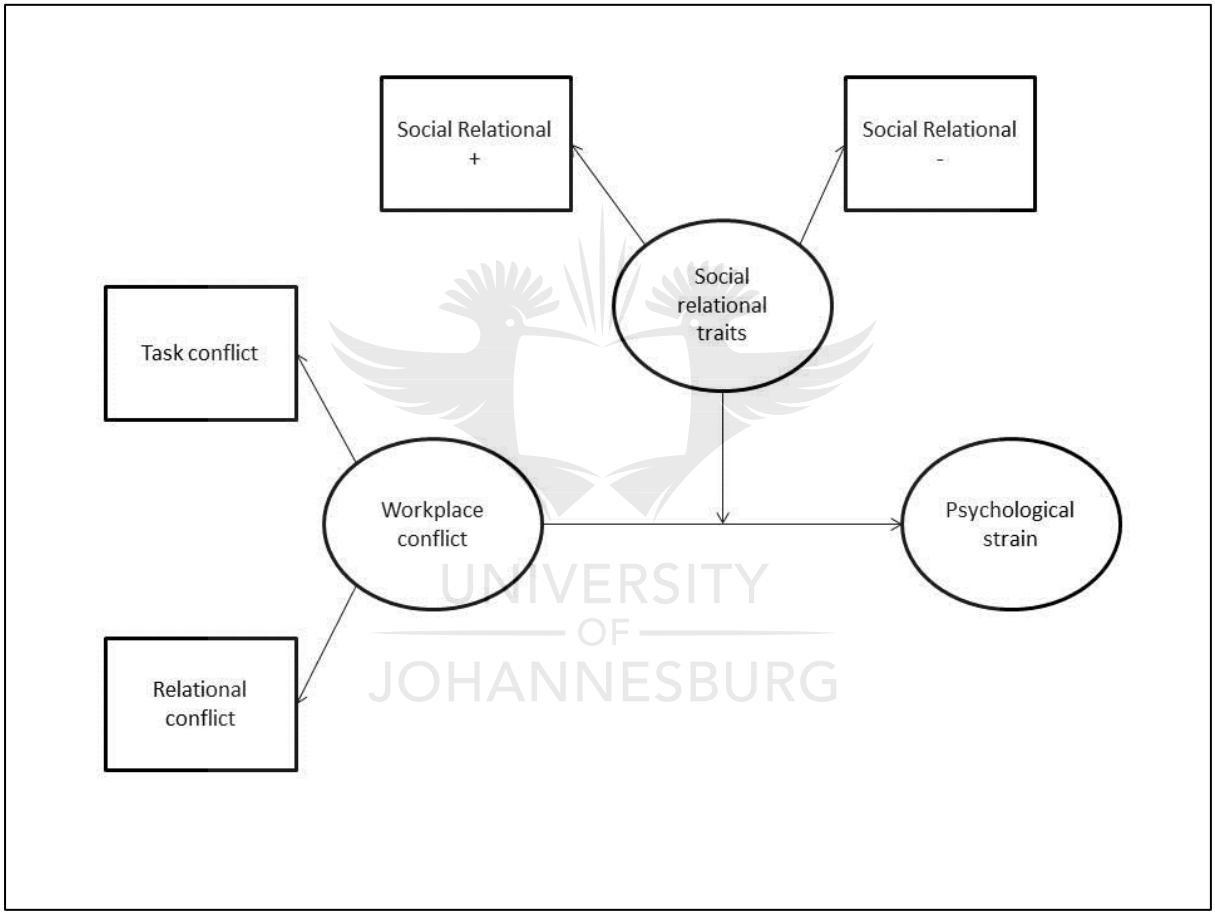

Figure 1. Hypothesised Research Model

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction to the study. The major variables of the study were briefly introduced in the background of the study, along with the problem statement. The chapter concluded by providing the objectives of the study and the hypothesised model

of the study. The remainder of the dissertation will be structured as follows. First, a literature review will be provided. Thereafter, the research methodology will be explained. Aspects such as the research design, participants, psychological measures and ethical aspects of the research will be discussed. The results will be presented and the study will eventually conclude with a discussion of the research results.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section discusses existing literature on the variables measured in the study. It begins with the theoretical model that the study is based on. The section also provides existing definitions of variables tested in the study. After that, the relationships connecting the variables of the study are discussed in detail.

2.2 The Job Demands Control Model

According to the Job Demands Control (JDC) model (Karasek Jnr, 1979), employees experience job strain at work as an outcome of two work characteristics namely: (i) job demands and (ii) job control. Job demands are the environmental stimuli or stressors placed on employees that induce their experience of psychological strain on the job (Karasek Jnr, 1979). In the current study, workplace conflict is viewed as a type of environmental demand or stressor that employees experience at work (Frone, 2000). Seen in another way, Job control refers to the employees' propensity to control environmental stimuli placed on them on the job (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Job strain manifests when employees have high demands and less control over job demands (James & Sidin, 2017). Hence when employees experience job strain, they will likely show signs of reduced physical and psychological well-being (Snyder et al., 2008; Beehr, 1995; Jex, 1998).

The JDC model proposes two hypotheses, namely a strain hypothesis and a buffer hypothesis. On the one hand, according to the JDC models' strain hypothesis, individuals working in occupations characterized by high environmental demands and low control over such demands, are more prone to show reduced levels of psychological wellbeing (Huang,

Chen, Yang, Huang, 2011). On the other hand, the buffer hypothesis postulates that control over the environmental stimuli can mitigate the negative impacts of the high demands on well-being (Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). The current study then, views workplace conflict as a type of job demand that causes psychological strain. Social relational personality traits are seen as the buffer (moderator) in the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain.

With reference to the above mentioned, it is expected that employees facing high task and relational conflict (high environmental demands), who are low on control (low social relational positive traits and/or high social relational negative traits to deal with conflicts) will experience more psychological strain. Contrarily, we may expect that employees facing high task and relational conflicts (high environmental demands), who are nonetheless high in control (high social relational positive traits and/or low social relational negative traits), are likely to experience reduced levels of psychological strain as postulated by the JDC model (Van der Doef & Maes, 1999).

The JDC model is useful to understand job demands and job control in the African context for greater generalisability (Györkös, Becker, Massoudi, de Bruin, & Rossier, 2012). Additionally, research also suggests that adding the dimension of personality in the JDC model will massively strengthen its value (Györkös et al., 2012). The JDC model has been critiqued for solely conceptualizing work demands based on the workload only and not paying attention to other types of demands (Cox, Griffiths, & Rial-Gonzalez, 2000). As such, the current study extends on this critique of the JDC model by looking at workplace conflict as another type of job demand.

2.3 Workplace Conflict

Hastings (2007) defines workplace conflict as stemming from a combination of various factors within the organisation. According to him, workplace conflict relates to issues such as employees having different ways of working towards achieving the same goals, clashes in employees' personalities, differences in ways of communicating to each other and competing over resources such as finances and other benefits. This broad definition underlines two dimensions that comprise workplace conflict – task conflict and relational conflict (Jehn, 1995).

Task conflict is evidenced when there are differences between members of the group in an organisation concerning how a task at hand should be completed or performed (Sonnentag, Unger, & Nägel, 2013). This relates to when there are contrasting or clashing views and suggestions between group members, who have different perceptions on the appropriate actions to employ in task execution (Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Differences range from disagreements in opinions, steps to be taken, rules to follow and resources to allocate in order to solve task related problems (Bono, Boles, Judge, & Lauver, 2002), and how task related facts ought to be interpreted (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). A practical example of task conflict is when two persons working together on a task suggest different ways to solve a problem, each believing his/her way is the best solution for a given activity (see Sonnentag et al. 2013).

Relational conflict on the other hand, is more at interpersonal level. Jehn (1992) defines relational conflict as the sort that exists in an organisational setting where members reciprocate feelings of personal friction, tension, and dislike towards one another. In

relational conflict, according Jehn and Mannix (2001), employees working together are aware of feelings such as annoyance, irritation and frustration towards each other. These behaviours mostly result from clashes or dissonance in personally related domains such as interests, beliefs, values (Thomas, 1992; Dijkstra et al., 2011), style of behaviour, personal standards and preferences amongst other things (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

Conflict occurs at all levels of an organisation and is evident within the tripartite levels of an organisational structure (Tjosvold, 2008). Conflicts occur at leadership/management level within organisations, at group level within teams, and at individual level within humans (Tjosvold, 2008). Thus, when analysing conflict, it is important that a triple-level analysis lens is used to view conflict within the workplace (De Dreu, 2008). In other words, conflict at work can be seen and analysed within the organisational, group and individual levels of the organisational hierarchy. De Dreu (2008) points out that at organisational level, workplace conflict may affect organisational imperatives such as stability, profitability and reputation, while at group level, conflicts are likely to have an impact of the processes or dynamics within the group and the subsequent group outcomes. At individual level, conflicts are likely to impact employees' subjective experiences/affective behaviours such as job satisfaction, turnover intentions and their general well-being.

With all being said, it is advisable to conceptualise the relative impacts of relational and task conflict at organisational, group and individual levels simultaneously. According to de Wit, Greer and Jehn (2012), high level relational conflict at group level is more damaging than task-conflict. Evidence shows that in work groups characterised by personally related feelings of hostility, hatred and disgust between members, the quality of the decisions, creativity and team productivity are all hampered (De Dreu, 2008). This is because, in relational level conflicts, there is a social or reciprocal exchange of undesirable behaviours.

This includes behaviours such as a lack of mutual respect amongst group members, antagonism and lack of citizenship behaviour within the group, all of which lessen group collaboration, performance and cohesion (Choi & Sy, 2010; Sy, Cote & Saqvedra, 2005).

Relational conflict in groups is seen as deflecting group members' mental capabilities away from focusing on the task to be completed (Jimmieson, Tucker, and Campbell, 2017), and focusing instead, on the interpersonally driven clashes and rivalries, thereby negatively affecting group performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Unsurprisingly, employees involved in groups characterised by increased levels of interpersonal conflict are reported to demonstrate diminished levels of satisfaction in their jobs (job dissatisfaction), high absenteeism rates, reduced productivity, and at worst, the rate at which they exit the organisation increases substantially (Ayoko, Callan, & Härtell, 2003; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Van Vianen & De Dreu, 2001).

From another angle, it can be asserted that the relative impact of task conflict is subject to debate as well. Researchers contending the positive impact of task conflict in groups offer compelling arguments. They argue that task related conflicts place a large cognitive demand on employees, resulting in group resources being distracted and wasted (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Choi and Kim (1999) also contend that conflicts on task-related activities delay the process of reaching final decisions due to the processes of negotiation, compromise and subsequently reaching consensus. They argue that this stalls the process of group implementation, which then affects the performance of the team.

Some theorists argue that conflict at work is not an entirely detrimental occurrence altogether (De Best-Waldhober et al., 2003). Their suggestions point out that for purposes of social development within all levels of the organisation, conflict can in fact be deemed as an important requisite (Jensen- Campbell & Graziano, 2001). Supporting evidence for task

conflict at group level highlights that task conflict does produce positive group outcomes such as improved generation of ideas and improved performance (Bradley, Postlethwaite, Klotz, Hamdani, & Brown, & 2012) when exercised constructively. The argument here is that task conflict provides subjects with an opportunity to mutually exchange information, thereby encouraging learning (Todorova, Bear, & Weingart, 2014). It also provides an opportunity for problem solving, mutual gain, human connectedness and the advancement of character and strength (Oore, Le Blanc, & Leiter, 2015).

Jehn and Bendersky (2003) add that task conflict ensures that the decisions made, are of the highest standards. The assumption here is that when group members have disagreements about the task at hand, it prevents members from reaching consensus on the task in a premature manner (Brodbeck et al., 2006; Schultz-Hardt, Jochims & Frey, 2002). Research shows that when there is consensus at the early stages of a group activity, without any form of opposing views or ideas, the outcomes of the group activity do not provide rich results than when there are opposing ends in the group activity (De Dreu, 2008). With all being said, it can be concluded that the impact of both activity related conflict and relationship related conflict affects the group/team level of the organisation by the same magnitude.

So far, the impact of conflict at the organisational and group level has been shown, and its impact at individual or personal level is evident as well. Dijkstra, Beersma and Cornelissen (2012) report that the prolonged experiences of conflict by employees at work has been shown to result in challenges for individuals concerned. They assert that employees prone to conflict at work are more likely to report dissatisfaction with their jobs, high levels of physical and emotional exhaustion, take time off work due to sickness, and lead to high turnover rates. Above all, the most essential impact of the experience of workplace conflict (task and relational) at the individual level are experiences of stress leading to strain.

According to Dijkstra et al. (2011), when one experiences task and relational conflict, this results in stress and the build-up of stress results in an outcome of psychological strain (Jex and Beehr, 1991). With regard to the psychological well-being of employees, researchers have argued that task and relational conflict need to be distinguished (De Dreu, Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1995). De Dreu, Dierendonck, and Dijkstra (2004) reiterated that task and relational conflict do not affect the well-being of employees in the same way. The assumption is that relational conflict negatively affects employees' psychological well-being to a greater extent than task conflict does. However, according to Sonnentag et al. (2013) both task and relational conflicts have a negative association with the psychological well-being of employees. There is thus evidence that regardless of the type, conflict at work results in employees showing signs of psychological strain (De Dreu et al., 2004).

2.4 Psychological Strain

Beehr and Glazer (2005) are of the view that psychological strain is evidenced when environmental stimuli at work increases pressure on employees, to a point where their mental states of functioning are completely deflated. In other words, psychological strain can be seen to be an end-point of an individual's severe exposure to experiences of stress in the organisation, thereby depleting one's states of emotional/affective functioning all together (Beehr & Glazer, 2005; Bhagat et al., 2010). James and Sidin (2017) also define psychological strain as the outcome of prolonged experiences of stress at work. Hence stress and strain are used interchangeably in this context.

According to Grandey and Cropanzano (1999) psychological strain is seen as a cognitive state that results when individuals feel that they have exhausted all their mental capital necessary to cope with the environmental demands placed on them. Given the variety

of the descriptions provided by researchers on this construct, the definition that the current study will use is that of Francis and Barling (2005). According to them, psychological strain can be seen as a psychosomatic outcome that results from a long time experience of stress at work. In essence, the risk of experiencing unmitigated psychological strain in the work environment is that employees suffer from severe issues both physically and mentally (Keegel, Ostry & Lamontagne, 2009).

Without any doubt, it is clear that psychological strain has detrimental effects not only on the employees but also on the organisation. Research has shown that employees suffering from psychological strain are less satisfied in their jobs, and also report to be less committed towards the organisation (Beehr & Glazer, 2005). Research further shows that as a result of prolonged experiences of strain at work, these employees report a greater will to exit the organisation altogether (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007). Additionally, research suggests that employees experiencing psychological strain act counterproductively with the intent to harm the organisation (Krischer, Penney, & Hunter, 2010), which has resulted in a substantial number of organisations failing due to financial losses (Coffin, 2003).

Other new suggestions provided by Bhagat et al. (2010) also provide interesting findings. According to them, psychological strain is oppositely correlated with desired behaviours in organisational behaviour such as: (i) job involvement, (ii) job satisfaction and (iii) job commitment. Explained in detail, they argue that the potency of psychological strain results in employees being psychologically detached from and uninvolved in their occupations. They also suggest that employees become unhappy, disgruntled and discontented with their jobs to the point that they leave the organisation. Lastly, new research also points out that when employees experience strain, they often display negative behaviours such as decreased levels of drive and energy, resulting in little output or productivity – in short, they yield products of mediocre standards (Keshavranz, & Mohammadi, 2011).

On a personal front, it is suggested that when employees are experiencing psychological strain they run the risk of suffering from a multitude of negative behaviours. James and Sidin (2017) point out that employees run the risk of feeling depressed, angry, hostile, low on self- esteem, irritable and irrational. A study conducted by Lee, Moon and Kim (2014) on employees working in a hotel in Malaysia found that employees experiencing stress/strain in their jobs suffered emotional and physical fatigue, which also led to loss of concentration and control over their environment, further resulting in them committing uncharacteristic mistakes or accidents. The results of accidents then invite financial costs for the organisation and its overall performance (James & Sidin, 2017). Keegel, Ostry, and Lamontagne (2009) add that due to the employees' ill wellbeing, organisations suffer from other financial losses and lack of effectiveness with employees being absent at work or exiting the organisation. Based on the aforementioned information, it is important that organisations in South Africa become aware of and provide interventions as well as solutions to end-point psychological strain which mostly stems from conflicts at work.

2.5 The relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain

A number of studies support the positive relationship between experiencing conflict at work, and subsequent experience of stress, leading to strain. According to Dijkstra et al. (2011), a large number of research findings show that an increase in conflict is also associated with an increase in strain symptoms. Jex and Beehr (1991) report that when employees are engaged in conflict over the way the tasks should be completed and over personal related hostilities, it leads to them experiencing stress, which in turn can lead to strain. Therefore, employees engaged in large amounts of conflict at work are stressed and experience psychological problems such as sleep deprivation, domestic issues, and also suffer from depressed moods (Danna & Griffin, 1999).

Employees engaged in conflict at work have been shown to display an array of strain related behaviours such as being angry all the time (Jones & Bright, 2001). They also appear uneasy, always looking over their shoulders in suspicion and distrust (Buunk & Gerichhauzen, 1993). Based on this, the relationship between the workplace and psychological strain can be detrimental to the survival of employees and the organisation at large. That being the case, extensive research on this relationship is needed in organisational behaviour. This is because the negative impact of task and relational conflict has been shown to be associated negatively with the experiences of psychological well-being in both the short and long term for employees (Dormann, & Zapf, 1999). Becker (2011) also shares the same sentiments, highlighting further that stressful work conditions (i.e. organisational related conflict) results in physical and psychological challenges /expenses for those subjected. According to a summary provided by Spector and Jex (1998), conflict at work leads to employees suffering from psychosomatic diseases such as headaches and musculoskeletal pains, feelings of anxiousness and frustration, as well as exhaustion associated with defining burnout (Denny & Spector, 2005; De Dreu, van Dierendonck, & Spector, 2004; Spector & Bruk-Lee, in press).

It is worth considering if task and relational conflict impact on psychological strain equally. Based on this, research needs to be conducted to determine the relative impact of task and relational conflicts on psychological strain. Additionally, research needs to be conducted to establish if the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain is impacted by individuals' personalities as well. Based on questions above, we hypothesize the following:

H1: There is a positive relationship between task conflict and psychological strain.

H2: There is a positive relationship between relational conflict and psychological strain.

2.6 Personality

Our personalities are integrated wholes, summed up by interrelated parts of how we naturally think, feel and behave in our natural habitats (Funder, 1997). To date, the most prevalent framework that has been used to theorize the structure of our personalities is the Five- Factor Model (FFM) of personality (Törnross, 2015). According to the model, the conceptual maps of our personalities consist of Big Five factors: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Conscientiousness and Agreeableness (Györkös, et al., 2012).

Neuroticism defines an individual's natural disposition to experience adverse emotions such as being worried, insecure, anxious, tense and defensive when confronted by an external threat (Judge & Higgins, 1999; McCrae & John, 1992). Extraversion describes an individual's bent to gain energy from social interactions with people. It is observed in individuals' behaviours of warmth, affection, friendliness (Törnross, 2015), zest, vibrancy, and activeness (McCrae & John, 1992). Openness defines an individual's inclination to be receptive to new stimuli that are novel to oneself, shown by being curious to learn new things, independent and original (Törnross, 2015), open-minded, creative and 'thinking-out-of the box' (Barrick & Mount, 1991; McCrae & John, 1992).

Taylor and De Bruin (2006) define conscientiousness as the extent to which an individual is efficient and effective in planning, organising, and carrying out tasks. It is centred on an individual's natural identity to be achievement-focused, reliable, and inclined to maintain correctness, order, structure, standardisation, precision, tactfulness, responsibility and high work ethic (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge & Higgins, 1999; McCrae & John, 1992). Lastly, agreeableness defines an individual's character to show sympathy and

forgiveness, collaboration, sincerity and being trustful of others (Törnross, 2015; McCrae & John, 1992).

With the FFM having been explained, Jackson, Paunonen, Fraboni, and Goffin (1996) nevertheless ask: "are the five factors of personality adequate for providing a comprehensive representation of the whole personality structure?" (p.33). In South Africa, the personality structure is not made up of five factors. Research evidence provided by the South African Personality Inventory (SAPI), a measure of personality in South Africa, suggests that personality in South Africa comprises of six factors (Morton, Hill and Meiring, 2018), consisting of additional social relational personality traits that extend the agreeableness factor into two components, namely *social relational positive* and *social relational negative* (Valchev et al., 2014).

Fetdjaviev et al. (2015) assert that as much as the association between agreeableness and the social relational traits exists, these personality constructs are still mutually exclusive. The social relational constructs of personality exist within a continuum, with a positive and a negative end. The *social relational positive* trait describes the natural inclination of the individual to form positive relations with other people, whilst, *social relational negative* defines an individual's natural inclination to form hostile and controversial relationships with other people (Morton, Hill & Meiring, 2018). Hence, personality in South Africa is mapped by Neuroticism, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Openness, Social relational positive, and social relational negative (Fetvadjiev et al., 2015).

In the South African context then, it is plausible to use the SAPI as a measure of personality. Morton, Hill and Meiring (2018) describe the SAPI as a valid and reliable measure of personality in South Africa. The fact that the SAPI is a locally developed instrument, built on culture specific notions of personality from all the ethnic and cultural

groups in South Africa means that it can be used across all ethnic groups in the country (Fetvadjiev et al., 2015). Research also shows that the instrument can also be applicable in Western cultures. For example, a study by Valchev et al. (2014) showed that the social relational constructs were observable in the Netherlands, and contained the same structural make-up as the Big Five in South Africa. This means that the findings of the study can be generalised to both the South African and international population.

The SAPI's social relational personality traits provide a totally unique perspective to the understanding of social personality in worldwide research (Fetvadjiev et al., 2015). The additional social relational dimensions provided by the SAPI are useful in providing and differentiating between the latent facets of personality that exist beyond the five major factors (Jackson et al., 1996). The utility of additional facets that exist outside the major factors will provide a more holistic and broader understanding to the measurement of personality (Jackson et al., 1996). With that said, this study is important because few studies have investigated the social-relational aspect of personality in general and it is further expected that social traits have an impact on how people perceive and deal with conflict (Bono et al., 2002; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996). Provided that the social relational traits appear in the South African and some Western contexts, there is reason to believe that the social relational traits may also be evident in other contexts as well, and more research needs to be conducted to that end.

According to Jackson et al. (1996) more studies should be directed towards seeking additional aspects within the general personality model of the Big Five. He adds that as much as the Big Five Model explains a significant part of the structure of personality, there still lies a chance or measurement error, that some important lower-order personality traits may have been neglected. Another example is provided by research findings in a study by Jackson et al. (1996) who report that for a broader representation of the Conscientiousness factor, this

factor ought to be separated into two related aspects. One separate aspect has to measure an individual's inclination to plan, organise and maintain order in the external habitat (Jackson et al., 1996), whilst the other aspect has to be related to the measurement of individual's sense of drive, achievement orientation, and persistence (Hogan, 1987; Hogan & Hogan, 1992).

According to Jackson et al. (1996), providing substitute personality models unique from the FFM is a paramount requisite that researchers should be focusing on. Hence Jackson et al. (1996) encourage that researchers should conduct more research channelled towards extracting additional aspects from the 'high-order' factors of personality measurement. This partly explains why the current study focused on providing a unique framework of personality by looking at the social relational traits of personality.

2.7 The moderating effect of social relational personality on the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), mitigating or moderating variables weaken or strengthen the relationship, and the direction between predictor and outcome variables. The role of personality in the individual employee's inclination to be involved in conflict at work and their later experiences of subsequent psychosomatic diseases cannot be understated. Research has been shown to support personality as a moderating variable. According to Grant and Langan-Fox (2007) and Moyle (1995), personality has been found to moderate the connection between characteristics of work and mental well-being. In the current study, it can then be expected that the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain would be mitigated or moderated by personality traits/ dispositions. Spector and Bruk-Lee (2008) support the hypothesis of the study, that individuals' personality traits or dispositions

do impact on the strength and direction that conflict at work will have on their experiences of psychological well-being at different levels.

One of the reasons for how the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain may be moderated by personality is explained by Parkes (1994) and Warr (1987). According to them, some of the external stimulus such as conflict at work (task and relational), do not impact on the employee's experiences of strain in the same way. In other words, the strength of one's involvement to subjective experiences such as workplace conflict and psychological strain is subject to or dependent on the personality style or trait that an individual may have.

From another dimension, the moderation of the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain is explained from the assumptions of the trait-activation (Tett & Burnett, 2003), and the person-environment fit theory (Suls, Martin, & David, 1998; Dijkstra et al., 2005). The argument here is that employees react well in working contexts which are compatible with their personal traits and react negatively in working contexts that are not in line with their personal dispositions (Levin, 1935). This is supported by Dijkstra et al. (2005) who argue that individuals who are highly agreeable may be subjected to experiencing stress when working in a work context that is characterized by hostility and conflict. Moskowitz and Cotẽ (1995) reported that being highly agreeable increased the impact of conflict on experiences of undesirable emotions, as being engaged in situations that conflicted with one's traits causes added negative feelings. Based on this, it can be assumed that those high on agreeableness will experience struggle in work settings characterized by hostility than those who are low on agreeableness.

From a theoretical perspective, the moderating effect of personality is explained by an integration of: (i) the differential exposure model and (ii) the differential exposure-reactivity

model developed by Bolger and Zuckermann (1995) as expounded by Törnross (2015). Firstly, the differential exposure model (Bolger & Zuckermann, 1995) explains that differences in personality traits or dispositions do play an influencing role in individual workers' frequent exposure to stressors (conflict) at work. Secondly, they add the differential reactivity model which further states that, upon experience of stressors at work (i.e. conflict), personality traits/ dispositions do play an influencing role in individuals' subsequent response/reactivity to such stressors.

In simpler terms, Törnross (2015) explains that individual differences in personality traits play a strengthening or weakening role in individuals' affective experiences of stress or strain, while they also determine the strength and direction of the individual's subsequent reactivity. Overall, based on the practical and theoretical assumptions made above, the study can hypothesize that the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain can be moderated by personality. The assumption is based on the prediction that frequent experiences of conflict and subsequent affect (strain) may differ for individuals with different personality traits.

Based on the aforementioned, there are substantial studies that show support for the moderating effect that personality has on the perception of a stressful stimuli and the coping strategy in response to the perceived stressor (Becker, 2011; Wiebe & Smith, 1997). A study cited in Becker (2011) conducted by Miller, Griffin and Hart (1999) explains this using one of the factors of the FFM. According to the study, it was found that *conscientiousness* moderated the impacts of role clarity on the perceptions of stress. In the study, individuals that had high levels of conscientiousness (related to systemic, orderly and structured behaviour) promptly adapted their environments of work to be less of a threat to them (Grant & Langan-Fox, 2007). Based on the study, this showed that the plans or approaches that were utilized by conscientious workers in dealing with external stressors may have either

weakened or strengthened the nature of the stressor. According to Becker (2011), the results from the study highlighted that employees who are highly conscientious employ flexible and systemic methods to solve and manage their work, and this minimises their chances of being stressed by their work. In essence, for employees high on conscientiousness, the relationship between crafting their environment and their experiences of stress could have been weakened.

Based on the aforementioned example, showing the moderating role of personality, it can be assumed that for individuals high on the *agreeableness* personality trait, the relationship between conflict and psychological complaints is not present (Dijkstra et al., 2005) as they tend to solve conflict in a more proactive manner. Another example is a study by Harvey, Blouin and Stout (2006) of working school children, where the researchers predicted that proactive personality would buffer the association between conflict at work and their experiences of psychological strain. This therefore, shows that personality does have a moderating effect on the conflict-psychological strain relationship.

Social relational negative is related to an individual's inclination to approach relations with others in a violent manner and is defined by conflict seeking, deceitfulness, and hostility-egosim, while social-relational positive relates to managing relations with others in a positive manner characterised by showing facilitating behaviour, integrity, social intelligence, interpersonal relatedness, and warm-heartedness (Hill, Nel, Bruwer, & Stevens, forthcoming). Previous research has shown that social traits, such as agreeableness, affect the experiences of conflict and strain. Suls et al. (1998) point out that individuals high on agreeableness tend to feel emotions of strain when faced with conflict at work and will tend to refrain being involved at the immediate time of occurrence. Furthermore, during moments of conflict, individuals high on agreeableness tend to approach conflict from the stance of finding a solution (Nauta & Sanders, 2000).

In essence, substantial research evidence supports that personality does moderate the connection between characteristic work dynamics such as conflict, and subsequent mental/psychological well-being as the differential reactivity model also predicts (Grant & Langan-Fox, 2007; Moyle, 1995). As with predictions made by Törnross (2015), due to their natural disposition, individuals high on *agreeableness* may not be prone to experiencing work demands (such as conflict), which may minimize their experiences of strain at work.

In line with such research, the current study focuses on the moderating effect of social relational traits (extensions of agreeableness factor) as measured by the SAPI on the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain. The current study therefore hypothesizes that:

H3: The relationship between a) task conflict and b) relational conflict respectively and psychological strain, is moderated by positive social relational personality.

H4: The relationship between a) task conflict and b) relational conflict respectively and psychological strain, is moderated by negative social relational personality.

These hypotheses were tested in the current study within organisations in the South African context.

2.8 Conclusion

This section provided existing literature on the theoretical framework, workplace conflict (task and relational conflict), personality and psychological stress/strain, in separate parts of the chapter. The relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain was discussed, as was the moderating effect of personality in the relationship, along with the hypotheses for moderation effects.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter provides an outline of the research methodology for this study. The methodology encompasses specific research related aspects utilised in the study. This includes the (i) research approach used to test the research hypotheses and meet the research objectives, (ii) procedures followed to conduct the study, (iii) biographical make-up of the research sample and (iv) the sampling techniques used to gather the research participants.

Other aspects of the research methodology include (v) the measurement instruments used to quantify the tested variables, (vi) statistical analyses methods used to analyse data, and (vii) the ethical requirements met in the study.

3.2 Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional research approach was followed in this study. In quantitative research, data on the measured constructs is gathered and represented in numerical form, with the relationships between the quantified variables calculated and established empirically, and inferences made objectively thereof (Burns & Grove, 2005). The major advantage of utilising this approach is that the inferences made on the tested variables are objective/empirical, as the methods of data gathering and analysis eliminate the influence of researcher subjectivity (Amaratunga, Baldry, Sarshar, & Newton, 2002). However, the major drawback of this approach lies in its inability to capture underlying themes that may be

important in explaining the relationship between variables that may not be expressed in numerical terms. It only provides a numerical 'picture' explaining the relationship between measured constructs from an empirical perspective, which may be seen as a 'part' of the holistic explanation of the relationship between variables that are tested (Amaratunga et al., 2002).

A cross-sectional research strategy using surveys was also followed in the study (Neuman, 2003; Oppie, & Henn, 2013). A cross-sectional design allows for more than one variable to be measured simultaneously on a large sample of participants (Bryman et al., 2009). The advantage of the cross-sectional design is its ability to produce statistical results that are simple to quantify and interpret (Neuman, 2003). The drawback of this design however, is that the results generated may change over time if the study is conducted in different research conditions as the results only present a 'picture' of current human behaviours at a time (Levin, 2006).

3.3 Research method

3.3.1 Participants

3.3.1.1 Participants and Sampling Procedure

The study consisted of a sample of (*N*= 230) employees working in a wide range of occupations in different sectors and covered a broad spectrum of occupations deemed 'work' or employment in South Africa. Participants of the study ranged from employees in low level occupations such as domestic workers and security guards, to high level occupations such as Tax Specialists and Accountants, to mention a few. To participate in the study, participants were required to have (i) accumulated at least two years of work experience, (ii) should be

working in any sector or industry, holding any full-time or part time occupation and (iii) should be proficient in English.

Utilizing a *purposive sampling technique*, participants were selected based on their suitability to best represent the above criteria set for inclusion in the study. This sampling procedure ensured greater representativeness of the participants in the study, as it automatically excluded those who did not meet the set criteria. Eight respondents did not meet the criteria for participation and were duly not included for further analysis. Table 1 below provides the biographical information of the research sample.

Table 1

Biographical information of the sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	100	43.3
	Female	130	56.3
	Missing	1	0.4
Marital Status	Single/Widow/Widower	121	52.4
	Engaged/in a relationship	30	13.0
	Married	70	30.3
	Divorced	7	3.0
	Separated	2	0.9
	Remarried	-	-
	Missing	1	0.4
Ethnicity	Black	191	82.7
	Coloured	8	3.5
	Indian	9	3.9
	White	22	9.5
	Other	-	-
	Missing	1	0.4

Home Language	Afrikaans	19	8.2
	English	28	12.1
	Sepedi	19	8.2
	SeSotho	12	5.2
	Setswana	15	6.5
	Siswati	5	2.2
	Tshivenda	2	0.9
	IsiZulu	106	45.9
	IsiNdebele	1	0.4
	IsiXhosa	10	4.3
	Xitsonga	9	3.9
	Other	-	-
	Missing	5	2.2

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highest Qualification	Grade12	62	26.8
	Bachelors/B.Tech/Diploma	103	44.6
	Honours Degree	52	22.5
	Master's Degree	11	4.8
	Doctorate Degree	1	0.4
	Missing	2	0.9
I work	Full-Time	212	91.8
	Part-Time	17	7.4
	Missing	2	0.9
I work for:	Work for an employer	222	96.1
	I am self-employed	7	3.0
	Missing	2	0.9
Level of position	Trainee/Intern	24	10.4
	Senior Manager	19	8.2
	Junior Manager/Supervisor	31	13.4
	Executive	2	0.9

	Middle Manager	31	13.4
	Non-Manager	63	27.3
	Other	51	22.1
	Missing	10	4.3
Variable	**Category**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Age	20 – 30	81	35
	31 – 40	73	32
	41 – 50	43	19
	51 – 60	23	10
	61 – 70	3	1
	Missing	8	3
English readability	Poor	4	1.7
	Good	80	34.6
	Very Good	146	63.2
	Missing	1	0.4

From Table 1, a sum of 230 employees took part in the study, with 100 (43.3%) being male and 130 (56.3%) female. In the study, 91.8 % (*n* = 212) were working on a full-time basis, while 7.4 % (*n* = 17) held part-time positions, working for an employer (N = 222, 96.1%) and others self-employed (*n* = 7, 3.0%). The majority of the participants in the study were Zulu speaking people (*n* = 106; 45.9%). The other languages as spoken in the sample were as follows: Afrikaans (*n* = 19; 8.2%), Sepedi (*n* = 19; 8.2%), SeSotho (*n* = 12; 5.2%), Setswana (*n* = 15; 6.5%), SiSwati (*n* = 5; 2.2%), Tshivenda (*n* = 2; 0.91), Xhosa (*n* = 10; 4.3%), IsiNdebele (*n* = 1; 0.4%) and XiTsonga (*n* = 9 ; 3.9%).

In terms of the highest level of qualification, the majority of the participants in the study (*n* = 103, 44.6%) held B-Tech, Bachelor/ Diploma qualifications. A Grade 12 qualification was held by 26.8% (*n* = 62) of the sample, while 22.5% (*n* = 52) held an Honours degree, 4.8 % (*n* = 11) has a Master's degree, and small fraction of 0.4% (*n* = 1)

held a doctorate degree. The high level of literacy amongst the majority of participates also reflected in the English reading ability of the participants as only *n* = 4 (1.7%) of the sample reported a poor reading ability, *n* = 80 (34.6%) reported that they had a good reading ability and *n* = 146 (63.2%) participants had very good English reading ability.

3.3.2 Instruments

3.3.2.1 Biographical Questionnaire

A *demographic questionnaire* was used to capture the biographical information of the participants including: gender, age, marital status, ethnicity, home language, level of education, employment status, years of work experience and level of position, number of children, and English reading proficiency.

3.3.2.2 Workplace Conflict Scale

The nine item ***Intragroup Conflict Scale*** (Pearson et al., 2002; Hjertø & Kuvaas, 2009), originally developed by Jehn (1995) was adapted for the purpose of the study. The items were adapted to statement form instead of the question format, to measure workplace conflict. The scale measured two dimensions of workplace conflict: relational conflict (5 items) and task conflict (4 items). An example item illustrating relational conflict included, “There was much anger among members of the group” and an example item illustrating task conflict included "There were many disagreements over the different ideas". Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly agree”). Previous research showed that the ICS was a reliable measure of workplace conflict, with

reliability coefficients (Cronbach alphas) of .79 for the task conflict scale and .85 for the relational scale (Pearson et al., 2002).

3.3.2.3 Psychological Strain Scale

***The General Work Stress Scale (*GWS**), which formed part of the Sources of Work Stress Inventory (De Bruin & Taylor, 2006) was used to measure psychological strain. The scale consisted of nine items that are rated on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 ("never") to 5 ("always"). An example showing psychological stress/strain item included, "Does work make you so stressed that you find it hard to concentrate on your tasks?" According to de Bruin (2006), a single total score on the GWS provided a numerical sum of an individual's psychological strain. A study by de Bruin (2006) reported GWS scales' Cronbach alphas of .89 for group 1 and .88 for group 2 respectively.

3.3.2.4 Social Relational Personality Traits Scale

The South African Personality Inventory (Valchev et al., 2014) was used to measure the social relational personality traits. The scale consisted of 188 items measuring the Big Five personality traits. More specifically, 34 items measured the social relational negative trait and 54 items measured the social relational positive trait. Due to copyright, examples of items for this measure cannot be provided. Responses of the scale were rated on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A study by Valchev et al. (2014) reported Cronbach alphas for the social relational scales on the SAPI ranged from .59 to .92 with an average of .81 for the Black population, while for White population, the Cronbach alphas ranged from .74 to .89 with an average of .81.

3.4. Research Procedure

The research data was gathered using an online and manual process. In the online method, online surveys were disseminated via emails and other technology platforms for participants to complete. To access the online survey, participants were required to log onto the given URL link address, which allowed for access to the survey. In the manual approach, physical copies of the survey were handed out to participants for them to complete using paper and pencil. The participants were not subjected to any time limits when responding to the questionnaires. This rounded approach was useful in ensuring higher response rates and inclusivity of all working individuals.

Prior to completing the questionnaires, participants' informed consent was obtained. In the consent form, participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their identities. A clear stipulation that the information gathered from the study was to be used for research purposes only was given in the consent form. This included that there were no financial incentives or any other forms of tangible rewards that were given for participation in the study. Upon agreement to the terms of research and meeting the criteria for participation, participants were required to tick on the statement provided on the survey indicating that they understood the goal of the study and their free will to participate in the study. During the collection of data, the responses from the online surveys were captured automatically on the online system upon completion. The pen and paper surveys were physically collected from the participants upon completion. The participant responses from both methods were then consolidated onto a single Excel Spreadsheet document for further analysis.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

A statistical analysis was run using the SPSS programme (SPSS Inc., 2010). Prior to running the statistical analysis, data was cleaned of any typing errors, out of range responses, missing values and extreme outliers. After cleaning the data, the following steps were followed to analyse it.

3.5.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis

Before commencing with the statistical analysis, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the factor structure of the variables tested in the study as per suggestions of theory. From the exploratory factor analysis, the items that loaded on the latent variables were determined, and the factors of the latent variables were also extracted before data analysis (Child, 1990; Netemeyer et al., 2003). From the exploratory factor analysis, the items with eigen values greater than 0.3 were retained on the factors of the scales (Fabrigar, MacCallum, Wegener, & Strahan, 1999). In conducting factor analysis, the following factor structure was extracted:

On the South African Personality Inventory (SAPI) two factors, namely Social relational positive trait (loaded by 54 items) and Social Relational Negative (loaded by 34 items) were extracted. On the Intragroup conflict scale (ICS), two factors – task conflict (4 items) and relational conflict (5 items) were extracted. Lastly, on the General Work Stress (GWS) scale, a one factor structure was extracted with 9 items loading it.

3.5.2. Descriptive statistics

Indices under descriptive statistics: average mean, average standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis, reliability coefficients for the scales were obtained. Wegner (2007) explains the utility of obtaining the descriptive statistics by suggesting that when working with 'big data' from the respective scales, descriptives help to consolidate the information about the measured constructs into simpler terms, including how the responses in these scales are distributed (Healey, 2012).

To provide an indication of the individuals' responses on the scales, average mean scores were calculated (mean statistic divided by number of items per scale). To indicate how data was distributed on the scales, skewness and kurtosis values were observed. Skewness and kurtosis relate to the degree to which the data is distributed around the mean (Kline, 2010). The Skewness indicates how centrally the responses are distributed around the mean, while kurtosis values indicate the height of the data, in terms of how flat and peaked the responses were distributed (Pallant, 2007). The skewness ranges of <|2| and skewness range of <|4) were observed. According to Wegner (2007), observing normality of data (i.e. skewness and kurtosis) provides an indication of how true the observed data is for the sample in the study, which can then provide for a valid generalisation to the whole population. Lastly, the reliability coefficients of the scales were also calculated to indicate whether the scales reliably measured the constructs that they are supposed to measure. Scales with Cronbach alpha statistics above 0.7 were deemed acceptable to measure the tested variables of the study (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003).

3.5.3. Correlation Analysis

To test for the relationship between the independent variables under workplace conflict (task conflict and relational conflict) with the outcome variable (psychological

Strain), Pearson's correlation coefficients were analysed. According to Pallant (2011) the association between the predictor variable and the outcome variable is assessed in correlation analysis. The Pearson correlation coefficients were observed to indicate the magnitude/size of the relationship between the two constructs (Kline, 2010; & Pallant, 2011). When analysing the magnitudes of the correlations between independent variables and dependent variable, the effect sizes of: $r = 0.1$ (small effect), $r = 0.3$ (medium effect) and $r = 0.5$ were used (Cohen, 1992).

3.5.4 Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

Moderation occurs when the effect of the predictor variable (IV) on the outcome variable (DV) depends on the level of third variable influencing the relationship (Baron & Kenny, 1986). To test for the moderating effect of social relational personality traits on the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain, a hierarchical multiple/ regression analysis was conducted. In particular, the interaction effect between the independent variables (task conflict and relational conflict) and the moderating variables (social relational positive and social relational negative traits) were included in the multiple regression to inspect for possible moderating effect. For the interaction effect, significant moderation was established using the relaxed criteria at ($p < 0.10$) as suggested by Aiken & West (1991).

Multiple regression analysis, the relative contributions of each of the variables on the single dependent variable were determined separately in a series of steps (Pallant, 2007), as reflected in Tables 4.4.1 to 4.4.4. The magnitude of the variance in the dependent variable (psychological strain) that is accounted for as a result of the independent variables was taken into account. The R^2 change values were used to indicate the variance caused by the

independent variables given as a percentage. The assumptions for homoscedasticity and multi-collinearity were met. The Mahalanobis and Cook distributions were met prior to analysing data (Pallant, 2013).

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Relevant ethical standards were upheld during the course of the study as per research regulations of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2008). Most importantly, the participants were treated with respect, fairness and courtesy throughout the course of the study. Before taking part in the study, informed consent to take part was obtained from the participants. A clear stipulation of what the research entailed was provided in the participants' consent forms. The purpose of the study, participants' right to withdraw from it at any stage without any coercion, and their voluntary participation were guaranteed. The identities of the participants were kept confidential and anonymous and the results from the study were also stored in a safe place for evidence purposes only. Information generated from the study was not shared with any unauthorized persons, with access only granted to the researcher and the authorized lecturer or supervisor involved in the study.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided the research methodology for the study. Included in the research methodology was information regarding the research design/approach adopted in the study, the research procedures, research participants and the sampling technique employed to recruit participants for the study. Added to that was information on the assessment tools used in the study, statistical analyses methods, and the ethics employed in the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the results generated from the study are discussed in detail. Firstly, the chapter will commence with an analysis of the results of the (i) descriptive statistics of the scales, and the (ii) correlation analysis of the predictor and outcome variables. Lastly, the chapter will present results from the (iii) hierarchical multiple regression analysis of the variables tested in the study.

4.2 Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics of the scales namely mean scores, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis and reliabilities are reported in Table 2 below.

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics for workplace conflict, psychological strain, social relational traits scales

Scale	Average Mean	Average SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	*A*
Task Conflict	3.36	.81	- .71	.51	.90
Relational Conflict	2.92	.85	-.35	-.48	.85
Social Relational Positive	4.06	.39	-.18	.26	.96
Social Relational Negative	2.05	.51	.42	-.08	.92
Psychological Strain	2.43	.83	.51	.16	.90

Note: Values rounded off to two decimal places

Five constructs were tested in the study: task conflict, relational conflict, social relational negative trait, social relational positive trait and psychological stress/strain. To give

an indication of employees' exposure to task and relational conflict, and their subsequent reactivity in the form of psychological stress/strain, the average mean scores of the scales were calculated. The average mean scores for the social relational traits were also deduced to give an indication of an individual's natural disposition to form negative relationships with others (social relational negative), and to form good relationships with others (social relational positive). Upon observation of the mean scores for each respective scale, the following inferences can be made:

The Likert-type scale measuring task conflict and relational conflict ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For the task conflict scale, the mean average score for the sample was equal to 3.36. This suggests that on average, the sample *somewhat disagreed/agreed* to have experienced task conflict at work. On the relational conflict scale, the average mean score for the sample was 2.92, suggesting that most of the sample *disagreed* to having relational conflicts with members in the organisation.

The social relational scales also ranged on a Likert type scale of: 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For the social relational negative scale, the mean average score for the sample was 2.05, which suggests that the sample *disagreed* with the inclination of forming hostile connections with others at work. On the other side of the scale, the average mean score for the social relation positive scale was 4.06. This suggests that most individuals in the sample *agreed* that they were naturally inclined to form good interpersonal relationships with other people at work. Lastly, the psychological stress/strain scale measured employees' frequent experience of stress/strain at work on a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). From the scale, the average mean score for the sample was 2.43, which suggests that most participants in the study reported that they *rarely* experienced stress/strain as a result of their work.

From the above results, it can be inferred that employees within organisations tend to not be exposed to task or relational conflict. This may be due to their natural inclination to want to form good relationships with others at work, which, in turn, minimises their chances of experiencing stress/strain at work.

From the inspection of the normality indices (i.e. skewness and kurtosis) of the scales, the results from the descriptive statistics suggest that most of the sample's responses were evenly distributed on the scales. The descriptive statistics for skewness and kurtosis were within the cut-off scores of (< |2|) and (< |4|) respectively, suggesting that the data was evenly distributed and was a true representation of the sample. The reliability coefficients used for assessing the internal consistency of the scales were also above the minimum level of acceptance of .70 as per suggestion made by Natemeyer et al. (2003), which in turn means that the scales used to measure the variables in the study provided reliable outcomes.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

To determine the correlation between task conflict, relational conflict, social relational negative, social relational positive and psychological stress/strain, a correlation analysis was conducted (Table 3).

Table 3.

Pearson correlation analysis results

	1	2	3	4	5
Task Conflict	1	-	-	-	-
Relational Conflict	.67**	1	-	-	-
Social Relational	-.08	-.26**	1	-	-

Positive					
Social Relational Negative	.08	.27**	-.44	1	-
Psychological Strain	.18**	.31**	- .16*	.31	1

Note. ** = correlation significant at p < 0.01 (2-tailed); * = correlation significant at p < 0.05 (2-tailed)

Values rounded off to two decimal places

The correlation analysis in Table 2 above shows that the social relational negative personality trait has a significant positive correlation with relational conflict (r = .27; small effect, p < 0.01), whilst the social relational positive trait, has a significant negative correlation with relational conflict (r = -.26; small effect, p < 0.01).

Social relational negative has a positive relationship with psychological strain (r = .31, medium effect, p < .01) and social relational positive has a negative relationship with psychological strain (r = -.16; small effect, p < .05). Lastly, the correlation analysis shows that psychological strain has a statistically significant positive relationship with task conflict (r = .18; small effect; p < .01) and relational conflict (r = .31; medium effect; p < .01) respectively. This suggests that every unit change in task conflict and relational conflict is associated with a unit change is psychological strain in the same direction. Both hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 are therefore accepted (see page 23).

4. 4. Multiple Regression Analysis

Hierarchical multiple regression models were conducted to explore the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables (task conflict, relational conflict, social relational positive and social relational negative) on the single outcome variable (psychological strain)

in a series of steps. The regression effects will be conducted in the chronological order from Tables 4.4.1 to 4.4.4.

Table 4.4.1 Hierarchical multiple regression effect of task conflict and social relational positive on psychological strain

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficient		
	B	Std.Error	Beta	R^2 change	Sign.
Step1					
(Constant)	16.05	2.22	-	-	.000
Task Conflict	.41	.16	.19**	.04	.012
Step2					
(Constant)	29.59	6.08	-	-	.000
Task Conflict	.37	.16	.17	-	.019
Social Relational Positive	-.06	.03	-.18**	.03	.018
Step3					
(Constant)	2.14	24.05	-	-	.929
Task Conflict	2.42	1.74	1.12	-	.166
Social Relational Positive	.061	.106	.18	-	.563
TaskconflictX SRP	-.009	.01	-.99	.01	.240

*Note.*** = significant p< 0.05; * = significant interaction effect (relaxed critera) p < 0.10

SRP = Social Relational Positive

The results of the hierarchical multiple regression of task conflict and social relational positive and psychological strain deduced the following results:

In step 1, task conflict was used as a predictor variable. The results showed that task conflict [$F_{(174)} = 6.399$; $\beta = .19$] significantly predicted a positive increase in experiences of psychological strain (outcome variable),with R^2 change value of .035 implying a 3.5% increase in psychological strain scores caused by task conflict.

For step 2, social relational positive was entered as the independent variable. The cause-effect relationship of social relational positive and psychological strain showed a significantly negative relationship [$F_{(173)} = 6.140$; $\beta = -.18$]. The R^2 change value = .031 showed that 3.1% of the decrease in psychological strain is accounted for by the impact of the social relational positive trait.

In step 3, the interaction effect (task conflict X social relational positive) proved to be non-significant, suggesting that the multiplicative effects of both independent variables in step 3, do not account for predicting psychological strain. Hence, social relational positive does not moderate the task conflict- psychological strain relationship.

Based on this, hypothesis 3 is rejected in this model (see page 30)

Table 4.4.2 Hierarchical multiple regression of the effect of relational conflict and social relational positive on psychological strain

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficient		
	B	Std.Error	*B*eta	R^2 change	Sign.
Step1					
(Constant)	14.04	1.82	-	-	0.000
Relational Conflict	0.51	0.12	0.31**	0.10	0.000
Step2					
(Constant)	24.49	6.32	-	-	0.000
Relational Conflict	0.45	0.12	0.28	-	0.000
Social Relational Positive	-0.04	0.03	-0.13	0.03	0.087
Step3					
(Constant)	25.04	18.57	-	-	0.179
Relational Conflict	0.42	1.21	0.252	-	0.732
Social Relational Positive	-0.05	0.08	-0.14	-	0.568
Relational conflict X SRP	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.975

Note.
** = significant p< 0.05
* = significant interaction effect (relaxed approach) p< 0.01

SRP = Social Relational Positive

The results from Table 4.4.2 show that in step 1, relational conflict (independent variable) causes a significant positive increase in experiencing psychological strain [$F_{(172)}$ = 18.069; β = .31]. From the model summary, the results deduced an R^2 change value = .10 suggesting a 10 % variance in psychological strain accounted for by the effect of relational conflict.

In step 2, social relational positive was used as the independent variable after relational conflict was entered in the first model. The social relational positive trait proved to be a non-significant predictor of psychological strain. While also in step 3, the multiplicative effect (relational conflict X social relational positive) used as the independent variable did not significantly predict psychological strain. This suggested no moderating effect of social relational positive on the relationship between relational conflict and psychological strain.

Based on the findings above, hypothesis 3 is rejected (see page 31).

Table 4.4.3 Hierarchical multiple regression effect of task conflict and social relational negative on psychological strain

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficient		
	B	Std.Error	Beta	R^2 change	Sign.
Step1					
(Constant)	16.86	2.24	-	-	.000
Task Conflict	.36	.16	.17**	0.03	.026
Step2					
(Constant)	8.15	2.84	-	-	0.005
Task Conflict	.31	.15	.14	-	.048

Social Relational Negative	.14	.03	.33**	.11	.000
Step3					
(Constant)	23.80	9.34	-	-	.012
Task Conflict	-.81	.65	-.37	-	.217
Social Relational Negative	-.10	.14	-.24	-	.466
TaskconfX SRN	.02	.01	.80*	.06	.081

Note.
** = significant p< 0.05
* = significant interaction effect (relaxed approach) p< 0.10
SRN = Social Relational Negative

The results in Table 4.4.3 support the results from previous findings, indicating a significantly positive cause-effect relationship between task conflict and psychological strain [$F_{(176)}$ = 5.060; β = .17) . The R^2 change for the first model = .028 showed that for every unit increase in psychological strain scores, 2.8% of the increase is accounted for by task conflict in step 1.

In step 2, the results show that social relational negative causes a statistically positive increase in psychological strain [$F_{(175)}$ = 13.497; β = .33]. The R^2 change value = .106 increased in step 2 showing that added to task conflict in the first model, 10.6% increase psychological strain is accounted for by the social relational negative trait in the second model.

Step 3 shows a statistically significant interaction between social relational negative and task conflict [$F_{(174)}$ = 10.135; β = .80]. This implies that the social relational negative trait does moderate the prediction that task conflict has on psychological strain. In step 3, the R^2

change value = 0.015 suggests that the multiplicative effect of the model in step 3 causes 1.5% of the effect in psychological strain (see Figure 2).

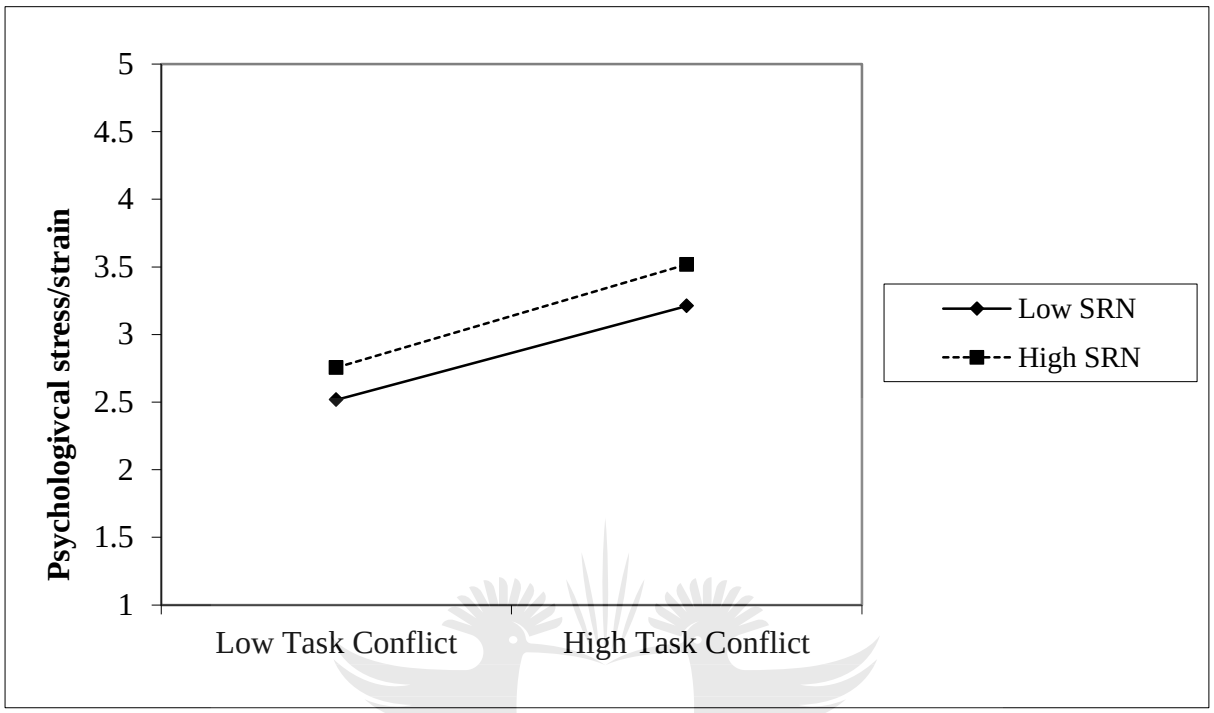

Figure 2: The Moderating Effect of Social Relational Negative on Task Conflict and Psychological strain/stress

The graph in Figure 2 shows that task conflict increases psychological strain in both groups (people low on social relational negative and people high on social relational negative trait). However, the strength of the relationship between task conflict and psychological strain is slightly stronger for individuals scoring high on social relational negative disposition than those who are low on the social relational negative trait. In simpler terms, people high on social relational negative personality generally experience higher levels of psychological strain than people lower on social relational negative personality.

Based on the findings on Table 4.4.3 illustrated in Figure 2, hypothesis 4 is accepted (see page 30).

Table 4.4.4 Hierarchical multiple regression effect of relational conflict and social relational negative on psychological strain

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficient		
	B	Std.Error	Beta	R^2 change	Sign.
Step1					
(Constant)	13.05	1.76	-	-	.000
Relational Conflict	.59	.12	.36**	.13	.000
Step2					
(Constant)	7.24	2.32	-	-	.002
Relational Conflict	.47	.12	.29	-	.000
Social Relational Negative	.11	.03	.26**	.06	.000
Step3					
(Constant)	18.46	6.95	-	-	.009
Relational Conflict	-.29	.46	-.18	-	.529
Social Relational Negative	-.06	.10	-.14	-	.564
RelationalconfXSRN	.01	.01	.71*	.01	.089

Note.
** = significant p< 0.05
* = significant interaction effect (relaxed approach) p< 0.10
SRN = Social Relational Negative

From Table 4.4.4 step 1 shows relational conflict as an independent variable. The results show that task conflict significantly predicts a positive increase in psychological strain [$F_{(175)}$ = 26.363; β = .36]. The R^2 change value = .131 posits that 13.1% of the increase in psychological strain scores is accounted for by relational conflict.

In step 2, social relational negative is used as the independent variable after relational conflict is entered in the first model. In the second step, the model is significant, with social relational negative predicting a positive increase in psychological strain [$F_{(174)} = 20.921$; $\beta = 0.26$]. The R^2 change value = .06 shows that in second model, relational conflict accounts for 6 % increase in psychological strain scores.

In step 3, (relational conflict X social relational negative) is entered as the independent variable after the second model. The results in this step show that the model (relational conflict- social relational negative interaction) is significant [$F_{(173)} = 15.079$; $\beta = 0.71$] and accounts for 0.013 variance in psychological strain. This implies that social relational negative does moderate the relational conflict-psychological strain cause and effect relationship (see Figure 3).

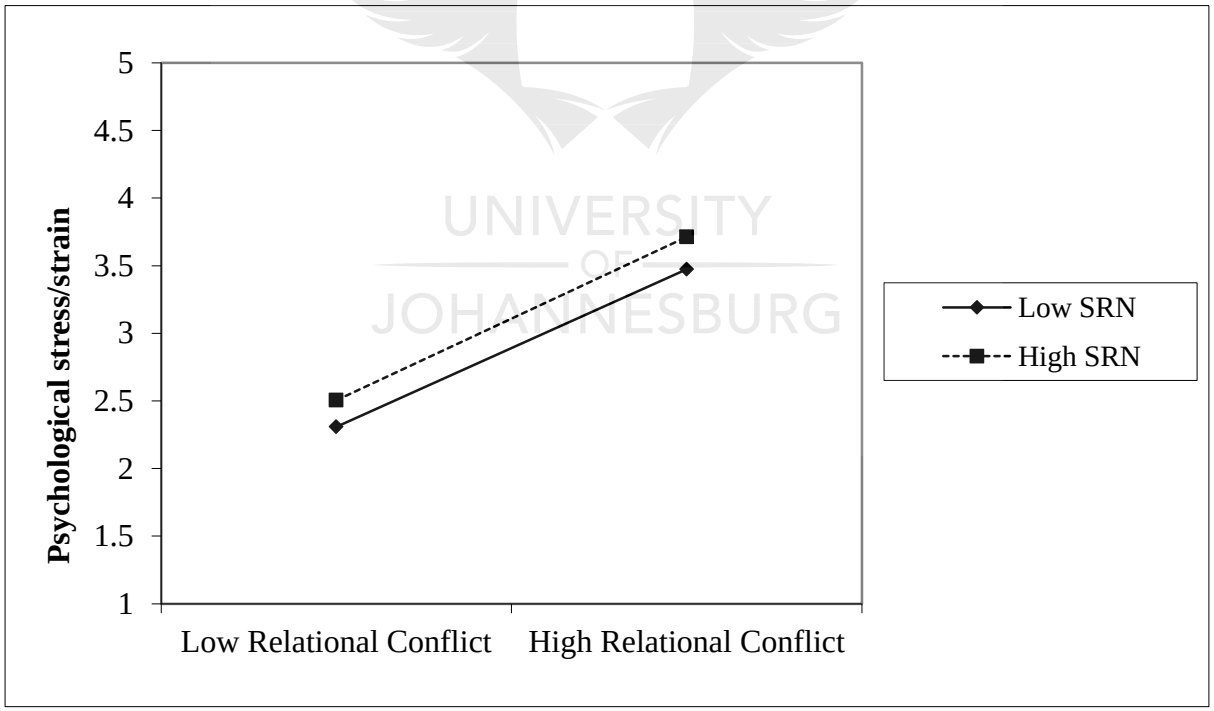

Figure 3: The moderating effect of social relational negative on the relationship between relational conflict and psychological strain

Figure 3 shows that relational conflict increases psychological strain in both groups (people low on social relational negative and people high on social relational negative trait). However, the strength of the relationship between relational conflict and psychological strain is proportionate across individuals high on social relational negative disposition and those who are low on the social relational negative trait. Much as that is the case, people with high social relational negative personality experience slightly more relational conflict and psychological strain. This means that both groups experience psychological strain at the same magnitude.

Based on the findings on Table 4.4.4 shown in Figure 3 above, hypothesis 4 is accepted (see page 30).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the results generated from the study. Results showing the factor structure of the variables: workplace conflict, social relational traits and psychological stress/strain were shown. In this section, results of the descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were also presented.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the final section of the research study in which the findings are interpreted. The results generated from the study will be compared to the hypotheses made at the beginning of the study, after which previous studies providing supporting and contrasting evidence to the findings in the study will be discussed. The chapter will then conclude by considering limitations of the study, proffering recommendations for future researchers and practical implications for organisations.

5.2 An overview of the objectives and hypotheses of the study

The main objective of the study was to determine the moderating effect that social relational personality traits namely social relational positive and social relational negative, have on the relationship between workplace conflict (task conflict and relational conflict respectively) and psychological stress/strain. From the objective of the study, the following hypotheses were made:

H1. There is a positive relationship between task conflict and psychological strain.

H2. There is a positive relationship between relational conflict and psychological strain.

H3. The relationship between a) task conflict and b) relational conflict respectively and psychological strain, is moderated by positive social relational personality.

H4: The relationship between a) task conflict and b) relational conflict respectively and psychological strain, is moderated by negative social relational personality.

The interpretation of the research findings will commence with discussing the cause-effect association that workplace conflict and psychological strain have. This will be followed by an interpretation of the moderating effect that firstly, social relational positive and secondly, social relational negative has on the workplace conflict-psychological stress/strain interaction.

5.3 Interpretation of the study findings

5.3.1 The relationship between workplace conflict and psychological stress/strain.

The results of this study indicate that experiencing conflict at work causes employees to experience psychological stress/strain. The results indicate that experiencing conflict at work causes employees to experience psychological stress/strain. A study by Illies, Johnson, Judge and Keeney (2011) also came to similar findings as this current study. The study by Illies at al. (2011) found that conflict at work between employees on relationships and tasks, immediately caused employees to experience negative affect on a regular basis. Other studies by Rahim (1983) and Shirom and Mayer (1993) were also similar to those of this study. These scholars concluded that when employees engage in conflict at work, the subsequent effects of conflict lead to employees experiencing psychosomatic symptoms related to stress/strain. Fairly recently, a study by Sonnentag et al. (2013) arrived at similar findings, that both task and relational conflicts caused decreased well-being amongst employees, manifested in psychological strain.

An interesting finding from this study confirmed that the effects that task conflict and relational conflict have on psychological strain are not equal. The impact of relational conflict appeared greater than the impact that task conflict has on psychological strain. Therefore,

experiencing social conflict impacts employees more severely in terms of their mental well-being. Findings from the study by Friedman, Tidd, Currall, & Tsai (2000) provide the same evidence, showing that when employees engaged in task conflict, they did experience stress /strain, albeit to a lesser extent than when relational conflicts were concerned. In essence, the findings from this current study show that the magnitude of the psychological strain depends on the type of conflicts that employees get exposed to. Task conflict appeared to impact less on employees experiencing strain than when they were involved in relational conflict at work (De Best-Waldhober et al., 2003). This suggests that task conflict often occurs at the instance of the task itself, and may not be emotionally demanding than relational conflict which may be long-lasting and more demanding emotionally. Be that as it may, an interesting finding by Sonnentag et al. (2013) was that task and relational conflicts often have the same effects on employees' experiences of psychological strain.

5.3.2 The moderating effect of social relational personality positive traits on workplace conflict and psychological strain

The findings from the study show that the social relational positive personality trait does not change the strength and direct effect that workplace conflict has on psychological strain. The social relational positive trait represents the positive valence of the sixth personality factor that extends on agreeableness, and is characterised by the tendency to forge good interpersonal connections with other people (Meiring, Morton, & Hill, 2018). The results gathered from the study suggest that workplace conflict causes psychological strain, independent of the impact of the social relational positive trait. The majority of the sample was from the Black population, and this may have impacted on the results of the study. A study conducted by Valchev at al. (2014) looking at the prevalence of social relational traits

between Black people from collectivist societies and White people from individualistic societies showed that the Black population scored higher on the social relational positive trait than the White population did. In the same study, the White population scored higher on the social relational negative trait than the Black population. The starting point of the results gathered from the study may then be explained by the fact that the vast majority of the population that took part in this study were from the Black population, and predominantly from collective societies and culture.

Research findings by Kaushal and Kwantes (2005), showed that culture influences a persons' conflict management and resolution behaviours, such that collectivist and individualistic cultures inform the style of behaviour in conflict situations, and individuals' personalities as well (Trandis, 1994). A practical example provided in their study was that in Western societies like Canada, disagreeing with a parent is normally accepted, whereas, in the African context, this may not be allowed at all. This suggests the possibility that for the Black population, cultural influences also inform their personalities and this may also eliminate the possibility of admitting to or engaging in conflict. The findings of the study illustrate that the way in which conflict is viewed is different across cultures. In some cultures, conflict may be encouraged, resulting in strain, whilst in others, in the Black population, it may be ignored (Kaushal & Kwantes, 2005) which may then eliminate the experiencing of psychosomatic strain.

On the other hand, culture also informs what is seen as stressful and how stress is viewed. Findings by Briner (1996) suggest that culture impacts on the way stress is viewed in society as well as its prevalence in a given society or culture. It is advocated that cultural beliefs play a significant role in what is seen or perceived as stressful, and the way that a

person should respond to stress (Liu, Spector, & Shi, 2007). The suggestion here is that in the Black community especially, stress may be viewed in a negative sense, and people may not be open to admit to be stressed/strained at work. Accordingly, the findings of the study illustrate that the way in which conflict and stress/strain is viewed is different across cultures. In the context of South Africa for example, in the collectivist communities conflict may be ignored or avoided (Kaushal and Kwantes, 2005) and experiencing strain may not be easily admitted to.

The results of the study that support hypothesis 3 are shown by findings of Dijkstra et al. (2011). In their study, the moderating effect of the solution-centric conflict management style, associated with people high on the social relational positive trait proved to be significant in the workplace conflict-psychological strain relationship. The findings from the study (Dijkstra et al., 2011) support that the inclination to solve conflict proactively, in a solution-centred manner, associated with people high on social relational positive personality decreased the positive cause that workplace conflict has on employees' experience of psychological stress/strain. Another study by Dijkstra et al. (2005) also confirms that people who are highly agreeable interpret and perceive conflict situations to maintain positive social relations, preventing them from experiencing the negative consequences of conflict on well-being.

This is because when agreeable employees manage conflict in a constructive way, they exert control of their immediate external stimuli, and this diminishes the negative outcomes of the conflict situation as well. Individuals scoring high on agreeableness tend to exert control of conflict situations by using constructive means to deal with the conflict than those scoring low on agreeableness (Jensen-Campbell, & Graziano, 2001). According to Graziano et al. (1996), individuals who score high on agreeableness are able to have control of their emotions by not being angry or reacting in any negative sense to frustrating

situations. This may be explained by the fact that in collective societies, showing self-regulated emotions or behaviours is the way that people are expected to behave according to the customs and traditions of the society (Triandis, 1995). By their nature, agreeable individuals prefer to keep good relationships with other people. This innate motivation may encourage them to come up with positive views and explanations to situations of conflict. These explanations make persons high on agreeableness to deal with and react to conflict in a less negative manner than would persons low on agreeableness (Graziano et al., 1996).

This was the assumption made in hypothesis 3 of the study. The hypothesis was that, based on the fact that people with a high social relational positive trait form positive relations with others, they would engage in less conflict at work. In instances where they were exposed to conflict at work, they would have the necessary personality trait to manage (control) conflict in a constructive manner that would then minimize their chances of experiencing strain. This hypothesis however, was not true for this study.

Other studies (Illies et al., 2011) found opposite results to the assumption that was made in this current study. The study findings by Illies et al. (2011) showed that the impact of interpersonal conflict at work and the subsequent negative affects was increased for people who were high on agreeableness. Individuals scoring high on agreeableness experienced more affective distress when they were involved in conflict situations where there was an exchange of hostility and arguments. Reason for this may be due to the lack of fit between their personal preference and their immediate environments. The results from the study showed that employees who scored high on agreeableness were more prone to be sensitive to the stressful effects of conflict than individuals low on the trait. This is because conflict situations are not in line with the natural disposition of their personalities, which then makes them struggle to cope in settings where there is conflict (Suls et al., 1998).

5.3.3 The moderating role of social relational negative on the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain

Hypothesis 4 made in the study, with regards to social relational negative, was that it would increase the strength of the causal relationship that workplace conflict and psychological strain have. Social relational negative is the negative valence of the sixth personality factor that extends on agreeableness, and is characterised by the tendency to form hostile interpersonal connections with others (Meiring, Morton, & Hill, 2018). The study hypothesised that based on their predisposition to form hostile relationships with colleagues, people high on social relational negative would be exposed to greater conflict and psychological strain as a result. As the study by Valchev et al. (2014) had shown, the White population mostly scored high on the social relational negative trait than the Black population. Based on this, the results deduced from this study on the increase of the impact of workplace conflict on strain may be explained by this small population in the study. As such, people with an inclination to be hostile and enter into controversial relationships with others, tend to suffer more psychologically when they experience conflict at task and relational level. The results from the study showed that the workplace conflict (task and relational) was increased for employees with a high social relational negative, which affected their mental well-being more severely as a result.

Findings from a study by Dijkstra et al. (2011) support the findings of this study, that the magnitude of the relationship between workplace conflict and psychological strain for employees low on agreeableness is greater than for employees high on the trait. The findings from their study showed that frequent conflict at work and less problem-solving orientation, associated with employees high on social relational negative trait were associated with experiencing more psychological strain. These findings were significant in this study for both

task and relational conflict and psychological strain respectively. Hence, findings of the study by Dijkstra et al. (2011) support hypothesis 4.

Reasons for this finding may be explained by the style of managing conflict by people high on social relational negative. Graziano and Jensen- Campbell (2011) found that, within a non-working sample, persons who scored low on agreeableness, meaning that they scored high on the social relational negative trait, most often preferred solving conflict in a hostile manner using physical retaliation and threats than persons low on the trait. This results in them being involved in more conflict situations, which in turn increases strain on their emotional well-being.

Additionally, research cites that individuals with a high social relational negative tend to approach relations with others in an aggressive sense, and may struggle to exert the control of their emotions during conflict. Emotional regulation relates to ones' ability to exert control over the external threat (Oore et al., 2015), and entails maintaining the intelligence to not escalate the emotions into anger and aggression when faced with conflict (Halperin, Porat, Tamir, & Gross, 2013). Based on their emotional control over the external stimulus, individuals high on this trait may then be prone to experience psychological stress/strain. The findings from a study by Kross, Ayduk and Mischel (2005) strongly suggest that teaching techniques to manage emotions, self-distancing and rationality in conflict situations would immediately reduce anger and the subsequent negative effects (i.e. psychological strain) associated with the conflict. In essence, the results from the study show that people with a social relational negative may lack the necessary control mechanisms to manage conflicts effectively, which may then exacerbate their experiences of strain.

With regard to this study, cultural influences may have had a significant influence on the results. This variance may be explained by the subset of the sample from the

individualistic cultures where confrontation in conflict is encouraged, in contrast to the individuals from collectivist cultures in which harmonious conflict resolution is encouraged. In individualistic cultures where confrontation is encouraged, this permissiveness may also result in employees from this culture experiencing more conflict and psychological strain. Findings from a study by Leung, Au, Fernandez-Dols, & Iwawki (1992) showed that in cultures of individualism, confrontational methods are encouraged in conflict situations, whereas in collectivist cultures harmony is preferred and reinforced. In other studies (Rahim, 1992; Leung, 1987), findings showed that in conflict situations, people from collectivist cultures more likely employ integrative styles of resolution that reduce experiences of animosity, whereas in individualistic cultures, people tend to deal with conflict by being dominant/obliging. The possible results from the study show that the small portion of the sample from the individualistic cultures, where confrontation during conflict is accepted as the norm, and this results in them being exposed to most conflict situations and experiences of strain thereof.

Given that the social relational traits are related to forming positive and negative relationships with other people, an interesting finding from the study by Illies et al. (2011) showed that receiving social support moderated the relationship between interpersonal conflict and negative affect. This same study showed that lack of social support prolongs the experience of negative affect of conflict, which suggests that because people high on social relational negative form hostile connections with people, they may not receive any social support from their co-workers than people low on social relational negative. This suggests that due to their hostile nature, people high on social relational negative may not receive the same level of support as a person low on the trait when confronted with conflict and strain.

5.4 Limitations

The study had some potential limitations which may have influenced the final findings. The major limitation in the study was that when measuring for agreeableness, participants may have been susceptible to respond in a socially desirable way. The possible assumption here is that agreeableness is a socially desired trait and the statements used to measure it in the study may have induced participants to respond in a way that would portray a socially acceptable behaviour (De Dreu, van Dierendock, & Dijkstra, 2005). Secondly, the length of the survey may have posed a cognitive load on the participants, more specifically, on the personality assessment as all the Big Five traits were measured along with the social relational traits which were the focus of the study. Lastly, the accessibility of all the race groups to take part in the study proved to be a limitation as the majority of the participants in the study were blacks, with other race groups not adequately represented in the study.

5.5 Practical Implications for organisations and literature

The findings from the study contribute towards our understanding of social relational personality traits. Most research focuses on agreeableness (Dijkstra, Beersma & Evers, 2011), and by considering the nature of agreeableness through positive and negative social relational traits, we can understand social relationships better. Given that negative social relational personality traits look at the hostility people have towards others and controversial relationships they form with others, we can explain in a better way, the nature of these effects on psychological strain due to conflict. Similarly, if we can understand the positive effects of being facilitative and supportive in relationships, we can help employees deal not only with conflict management but also overall work-related health.

The findings of the study have implications for managers and also workplace behaviour literature. For managers, an improved comprehension that conflict not only affects

observable outcomes such as organisational performance and turnover, and that it also affects other unobservable dimensions in the organisation such as the psychological health of employees (Dijkstra et al., 2011) will provide much needed awareness to managers and organisations. With this in mind, it would be reasonable to expect that such awareness would allow organisations and managers to develop effective strategies that manage workplace conflict in a constructive manner (Sonnentag et al., 2013). One of the strategies deduced from the study would be to implement problem-solving methods which were proven to reduce the workplace conflict-psychological stress/strain association (Dijkstra et al., 2011). Furthermore, as the study viewed psychological strain as an aftermath of conflict, this would change the view of the goals that organisations strive to achieve, and also make them recognise employees' psychological well-being as an important organisational goal to achieve as well (Dijkstra et al., 2011).

With regards to the workplace behaviour literature, the study has potential implications as well. Firstly, in personality literature, the introduction of social relational personality traits will broaden the scope of the personality facets that exist, beyond the traditional Big Five personality dimensions. Future researchers may explore this further. Overall, the current study is likely to provide a broader understanding of topics such as burnout and psychological well-being of employees (Rothmann, 2003; Van der Colff & Rothmann, 2009) and workplace conflict in South Africa (Spector and Bruk-Lee, 2008).

5.6 Recommendations for future studies

To improve the generalisability of the findings of the study to the broader population of the South African workforce, future research should focus on broadening the sample even

further, while channelling focus on specific sectors and occupations as the dynamics of conflict and strain are unique to different sectors and occupations. Furthermore, it would be reasonable to conduct studies that focus on comparing the relationship in the study between the race groups of South Africa whereby all groups would be equally represented, given that the personality instrument used encompasses all race groups,. Lastly, the study illustrated that other facets of personality exist beyond the five major facets of personality. Therefore, future research should also be directed towards extracting other facets of personality that may exist in other dimensions other than agreeableness.

6. Conclusion

Overall, the study has demonstrated the impact that task and relational conflict have on employees' experiences of psychological stress/ strain. On the one hand, the study showed that social relational negative traits strengthen the positive impact of conflict on strain, whereas social relational positive traits have no effect on the relationship on the other hand. As such, developing constructive conflict management strategies by employees and organisations to control for this relationship, would prove to be pivotal towards the promotion of organisational and employee well-being.

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